

BUSH SAYS HIGH-LEVEL DETAINEES WILL FACE FAIR MILITARY TRIAL

**By Stephen Kaufman
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WASHINGTON, SEPTEMBER 7 -- -- President Bush announced that he is sending draft legislation to the U.S. Congress that specifically would authorize U.S. military commissions to try captured terrorist suspects and would clarify the rules governing how U.S. interrogators may question detainees to gather intelligence against terrorist organizations and prevent potential terrorist activities.

Speaking at the White House September 6, Bush also acknowledged that the CIA has been holding and interrogating suspected terrorists, including members of al-Qaida. He said the remaining 14 prisoners in the program are being transferred to the Department of Defense's detention facility in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, where they will await trial by U.S. military commissions.

Among those being transferred for trial are suspected terrorists Khalid Sheik Mohammed, believed to be the third-highest al-Qaida leader before his 2003 capture in Pakistan; Ramzi Binalshibh, an alleged would-be September 11, 2001, hijacker; and Abu Zubaydah, who allegedly served as a link between al-Qaida leader Osama bin Laden and many cells in his organization.

PROPOSED LEGISLATION WOULD ENSURE FAIR TRIAL, PRESIDENT SAYS

Working with members of Congress, Bush said he was putting forward legislation to ensure the military commissions "are established in a way that protects our national security and ensures a full and fair trial for those accused."

He said the International Committee of the Red Cross will be notified and given the opportunity to meet with the 14 men. "Those charged with crimes will be given access to attorneys who will help them prepare their defense, and they will be presumed innocent," Bush said.

The president also said the Defense Department is releasing a new field manual September 6 that defines the treatment and interrogation procedures for detainees.

Repeating his desire to close the detention facility at Guantanamo eventually, Bush said he is continuing to urge countries around the world to take back those citizens being held at Guantanamo who will not be prosecuted by U.S. military commissions. "America has no interest in being the world's jailer," he said

Of the thousands of individuals captured worldwide in the War on Terror, only about 770 have been sent to Guantanamo; of those, about 455 remain in U.S. custody, Bush said. "They are provided the same quality of medical care as the American service members who guard them. The International Committee of the Red Cross has the opportunity to meet privately with all who are held there," the president added.

The president also said he has asked the U.S. Congress to pass legislation to clarify the rules for U.S. personnel involved in the War on Terror by listing "specific recognizable offenses that would be considered crimes under the War Crimes Act" and clarify that those following those rules and standards "are fulfilling America's obligations under Common Article 3 of the Geneva Conventions."

He repeated that the United States does not torture. "It's against our laws, and it's against our values. I have not authorized it, and I will not authorize it," he said.

SENIOR OFFICIALS EXPLAIN TIMING OF PRESIDENT'S DECISION

Prior to the president's remarks, senior administration officials speaking on background said it always has been the Bush administration's intention to bring the suspected terrorists to justice. The officials said the administration had been waiting for the Supreme Court to rule in the Hamdan case on whether trials by military commissions were "an appropriate venue" in which to do so.

The Supreme Court ruling confirmed that military commissions are appropriate, but determined the commissions needed additional congressional authorization, the officials said.

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